

## Unsocial sociability in the Scottish enlightenment: Ferguson and Kames on war, sociability and the foundations of patriotism

Article (Accepted Version)

McDaniel, Iain (2015) Unsocial sociability in the Scottish enlightenment: Ferguson and Kames on war, sociability and the foundations of patriotism. *History of European Ideas*, 41 (5). pp. 662-682. ISSN 0191-6599

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/56792/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

### **Copyright and reuse:**

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

**Unsocial sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment:  
Ferguson and Kames on War, Sociability and the Foundations of  
Patriotism**

IAIN MCDANIEL<sup>1</sup>

Department of History, University of Sussex, UK

**Summary**

This article reconstructs a significant historical alternative to the theories of ‘cosmopolitan’ or ‘liberal’ patriotism often associated with the Scottish Enlightenment. Instead of focusing on the work of Andrew Fletcher, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume or Adam Smith, this study concentrates on the theories of sociability, patriotism and international rivalry elaborated by Adam Ferguson (1723-1816) and Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782). Centrally, the article reconstructs both thinkers’ shared perspective on what I have called ‘unsociable’ or ‘agonistic’ patriotism, an eighteenth-century idiom which saw international rivalry, antagonism, and even war as crucial in generating political cohesion and sustaining moral virtue. Placing their thinking in the context of wider eighteenth-century debates about sociability and state formation, the article’s broader purpose is to highlight the centrality of controversies about human sociability to eighteenth-century debates about the nature of international relations.

**Keywords:** Adam Ferguson; Henry Home, Lord Kames; Scottish Enlightenment; Enlightenment cosmopolitanism; unsocial sociability; sociability; patriotism; nationalism; war; peace

1. Introduction

Some of the most interesting recent work on the ‘Scottish Enlightenment’ has emphasised the extent to which Scottish thinkers sought to understand the psychological foundations of patriotism and cosmopolitanism, and to reconcile the two in benign and politically viable

---

<sup>1</sup> E-mail: I.R.Mcdaniel@sussex.ac.uk

ways. For example, scholars have underlined the significance of Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun's analysis of international relations at the dawn of the eighteenth century, identifying in his thought a brand of cosmopolitan republicanism which found expression in a call for the reform of the European state system. Fletcher was a cosmopolitan patriot because he explicitly argued that the interest of 'every distinct society' should be guided by the 'interest of mankind'.<sup>2</sup> More recently, several scholars have drawn attention to cosmopolitan themes in Adam Smith's moral, political and economic thought, describing Smith's 'commercial' or 'economic' cosmopolitanism as an alternative to strong versions of moral cosmopolitanism as well as to narrower, exclusivist conceptions of patriotism.<sup>3</sup> One outcome of this research has been the recovery of a distinctively 'Enlightened' or 'liberal' theory of patriotism in the writings of Smith, along with those of his friend David Hume.<sup>4</sup> Although both Hume and

---

<sup>2</sup> Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA., 2005), 64-66; see also John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680-1760* (Cambridge, 2005), 161-83. On Fletcher's thought more generally, see John Robertson, 'An elusive sovereignty: The course of the union debate in Scotland 1698-1707', in Robertson, ed. *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the British Union of 1707* (Cambridge, 1995), 198-227; Robertson, 'Andrew Fletcher's Vision of Union', in Roger Mason, ed. *Scotland and England, 1286-1815* (Edinburgh, 1987), 203-25; Istvan Hont, 'Free Trade and the Economic Limits to National Politics: Neo-Machiavellian Political Economy Reconsidered', in Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, 185-266, esp. 258-66; Shigemi Muramatsu, 'Andrew Fletcher's critique of commercial civilisation and his plan for European federal union', in T. Sakamoto & H. Tanaka, ed., *The Rise of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (London, 2003), 8-21.

<sup>3</sup> Fonna Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy: Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory* (Cambridge, 2010), 196-217; Lisa Hill, 'Adam Smith's Cosmopolitanism: The Expanding Circles of Commercial Strangership', *History of Political Thought*, 31 (2010), 449-73; see also Robert A. Manzer, 'The Promise of Peace? Hume and Smith on the Effects of Commerce on Peace and War', *Hume Studies*, 22 (1996), 269-382. For a guide to different forms of cosmopolitanism in eighteenth-century thought (with relevance for the wider European debate), see Pauline Kleingeld, 'Six Varieties of Cosmopolitanism in Late Eighteenth-Century Germany', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60 (1999), 505-24. For a corrective to the idea that Smith believed that commerce would lead inevitably to peace, see Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, 111-25.

<sup>4</sup> Hume defended a moderate form of love of country as compatible with the general interest of mankind. Nevertheless, he thought that love of country easily degenerated into national prejudice or excessive national partiality. This, he argued, was a particular problem in mid-eighteenth-century Britain following the War of the Austrian Succession. As he wrote in his 1752 essay 'Of the Balance of Power', the people of Britain were 'animated with such a

Smith recognised that a cosmopolitan ‘love of mankind’ was a weakly motivating principle of human nature, both searched for ways of tempering the most malign expressions of national animosity in modern politics and, in Smith’s famous formulation, of separating the ‘mean’ principle of national prejudice from the ‘noble’ principle of love of country.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this article is to reconstruct a significant Scottish alternative to both the ‘cosmopolitan’ patriotism of Fletcher and the ‘liberal’ or Enlightened patriotism of Hume and Smith. Focusing on the theories of sociability and international rivalry elaborated by Adam Ferguson (1723-1816) and Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782), the article reconstructs their shared perspective on what I have called ‘unsociable’ or ‘agonistic’ patriotism, an idiom which had several distinctive components.<sup>6</sup> First of all, both Ferguson and Kames laid special emphasis on the ‘unsociable’ characteristics of human nature, which in turn explained the enmities that characterised relations between independent societies. The point here was not that human beings were naturally ‘selfish’ or egoistic – an emphasis on self-love was very prominent in both Hume and Smith – but rather that human nature was characterised by a principle of ‘dissension’, ‘animosity’, or ‘aversion’ that had significant consequences for

---

national spirit’, but ‘their passionate ardour seems rather to require some moderation.’ See Hume, ‘Of the Balance of Power’, in David Hume, *Political Essays*, edited by Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 1994), 158. For discussion, see Annie Stilz, ‘Hume, modern patriotism, and commercial society’, *History of European Ideas*, 29 (2003), 15-32.

<sup>5</sup> For Smith’s account of the relationship between patriotism and national prejudice, see Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Oxford, 1976), 154-55 (III.3.42), 227-37 (VI.ii.2); see also Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1976), II, 493-494 (IV.iii.c.9-11). For discussion, see Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, esp. 121-25.

<sup>6</sup> The term ‘unsociable patriotism’ is designed to emphasize contrasts with the idea of ‘sociable patriotism’, as this term has been used to capture the thinking of the critics of Hobbes and Rousseau in the eighteenth century. For an explicit use of ‘sociable patriotism’ see Béla Kapossy, *Iselin contra Rousseau: Sociable Patriotism and the History of Mankind* (Basel, 2006). I also use the term ‘agonistic’ patriotism as a way of highlighting the vital role of rivalry, contest and antagonism – as opposed to mere enmity – in generating patriotism. While Greek in origin, the distinction between rivalry and enmity comes out very clearly in Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M. T. Griffin & E. M. Atkins (Cambridge, 1991), 17 (I.38).

understanding international politics. Furthermore, Ferguson and Kames both offered positive verdicts on the formative role of the ‘rivalship and competition of nations’ as a foundation of the ‘national spirit’ (this was one of the key conceptual terms in both Ferguson’s 1767 *Essay on the History of Civil Society* and Kames’s 1774 *Sketches of the History of Man*). On this view, not only national rivalry and emulation, but even national prejudice, national jealousy and – *in extremis* – war could serve beneficial moral and political ends in securing the vigilance and patriotic cohesion of nations. Finally, this understanding of the dynamics of antagonism and competition among independent states underpinned a positive vision of Europe’s future as a balanced system of militarily-prepared and patriotic nations. In place of eighteenth-century views of Europe as a pacified league of commercial states, Ferguson and Kames proposed a balance of equal-sized nations characterised by healthy rivalry and patriotic discord.

It should be emphasised from the outset that this idiom of unsociable or ‘agonistic’ patriotism represented a partial but significant revision of the highly influential account of natural sociability set out by the Ulster-born Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), professor of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow between 1729 and 1746. Hutcheson is significant in this story as a point of departure for almost all significant subsequent Scottish thinkers, including Hume, Smith, Kames and Ferguson. In the sequence of works he produced in the 1720s and 1730s, Hutcheson had set out to refute the ‘selfish’ systems of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville, replying to Hobbes that the state of nature was not a state of ‘violence, war, and rapine’ but one of ‘peace and good-will, of innocence and beneficence.’<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *A short introduction to moral philosophy, in three books; containing the elements of ethicks and the law of nature* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Glasgow, 1753), 130-1, n. For Hutcheson’s earlier critique of Hobbes, see Francis Hutcheson, ‘Inaugural Lecture on the Social Nature of Man’, in Hutcheson, *On Human Nature*, ed. Thomas Mautner (Cambridge, 1993), 130-1.

Hutcheson's identification of a natural capacity for patriotism formed part of this broader argument about the natural sociability and benevolence of man. In his influential *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), Hutcheson wrote very positively of 'national Love, and the dear Idea of a Country'.<sup>8</sup> He underlined that devotion to the 'publick Good' was universally a source of moral approbation, citing the admiration aroused by the Dutch republican patriots in their struggles against imperial Spain.<sup>9</sup> The shared experience of 'natural affections and kind passions', he wrote elsewhere, was a powerful motivating force which could 'rouse men into another kind of love for their country, and resolution in its defence'.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Hutcheson insisted on the compatibility between a properly-oriented patriotism and a more cosmopolitan 'love of Mankind'. Echoing the ancient Stoic concept of *oikeōsis*, Hutcheson argued that human sociability found expression in concentric 'Systems' that ultimately encompassed the entirety of mankind. Although the intensity of benevolent affections, like gravity, diminished with distance, human beings were capable of a disinterested 'universal Benevolence' for all rational and moral beings (including, he conjectured, any intelligent beings on undiscovered planets).<sup>11</sup> The crucial outcome was that 'love of country' was by no means 'exclusive' in character. As Hutcheson wrote in the passage of the *Inquiry* dealing with the foundations of 'national Love':

---

<sup>8</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, ed. with an intro. by Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis, 2004), 115.

<sup>9</sup> Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 93.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Hutcheson, 'Reflections on the common systems of morality', in Hutcheson, *On Human Nature*, 103.

<sup>11</sup> Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 150, 114. Hutcheson's claim that the experience of a shared sociability could form the basis of a non-exclusive 'national Love' was influential among eighteenth-century moral theorists. A similar view of the compatibility between love of country and love of mankind was developed by the Welsh Dissenting minister, Richard Price, who shared Hutcheson's assessment of mankind's capacity for 'extensive' benevolent affections. On the wider eighteenth-century debate on 'universal benevolence', including discussion of Hutcheson's position, see Evan Radcliffe, 'Revolutionary Writing, Moral Philosophy, and Universal Benevolence in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54 (1993), 221-240. On Price, see Rémy Duthille, 'Price on Patriotism and Universal Benevolence', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 28 (2012), 24-41.

Whatever place we have liv'd in for any considerable time, there we have most distinctly remark'd the various Affections of human Nature; we have known many lovely Characters; we remember the Associations, Friendships, Familys, natural Affections, and other human Sentiments; our moral Sense determines us to approve these lovely Dispositions where we have most distinctly observ'd them; and our Benevolence concerns us in the Interests of the Persons possess'd of them. When we come to observe the like as distinctly in another Country, we begin to acquire a national Love toward it also; nor has our own Country any other preference in our Idea, unless it be by an Association of the pleasant Ideas of our Youth, with the Buildings, Fields, and Woods where we receiv'd them.<sup>12</sup>

While Ferguson and Kames were every bit as critical of the 'selfish' theories of Hobbes and Mandeville as Hutcheson had been, both of them made an important amendment to Hutcheson's perspective on sociable patriotism. Instead of seeing patriotism as part-and-parcel of a broader set of natural affections that (ultimately) encompassed the whole of mankind, Ferguson's and Kames's insistence on the unsociable characteristics of human nature pointed to severe difficulties in reconciling patriotic allegiance with cosmopolitan sentiments. The claim developed in this article is that Ferguson's and Kames's conceptions of mankind's 'unsocial' sociability ultimately represented a significant historical rival to the more conventional picture of human natural sociability that ran through much eighteenth-century moral thought. Their assessment of sociability's curiously Janus-faced character

---

<sup>12</sup> Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 115.

means that their writings should be appreciated as significant eighteenth-century theorisations of what Immanuel Kant was in the 1780s to term mankind's 'unsocial sociability'.<sup>13</sup>

My argument proceeds as follows. The first three sections of the article reconstruct Ferguson's account of 'unsocial' sociability and its implications for his analysis of international relations, the history of civil society, and his vision of patriotism itself. Conceiving his theory of sociability as a response to Hobbes, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Hutcheson, these sections reconstruct his depiction of international society as one driven by perpetual discord, which worked positively to create domestic union and concord. The fourth and fifth parts of the article concentrate on Kames's *Sketches of the History of Mankind*. These sections explore the moral psychology underpinning Kames's vision of a modernized *amor patriae*, which he saw as the essential quality of a free state and an urgent requirement for Britain in the 1770s. I argue that Kames shared a good deal of Ferguson's own perspective on the positive value of national animosity (which Kames called 'aversion'), and offered some further speculations on the danger of a fully pacified world. The article's broader purpose is to highlight the centrality of controversies about human sociability to the moral and political thought of the Scottish Enlightenment, and to eighteenth-century debates about the nature of international relations.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', in Kant, *Political Writings*, ed. H. S. Reiss (Cambridge, 1991), 41-53.

<sup>14</sup> On the connection between theories of sociability and models of international relations in the eighteenth century, see e.g. Lawrence Dickey, 'Doux-Commerce and Humanitarian Values: Free Trade, Sociability and Universal Benevolence in Eighteenth-Century Thinking', in *Hugo Grotius and the Stoa: Philosophy, Politics and Law*, ed. Hans Blom (Assen, 2004), 271-318; Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 37-51, 159-84; Benedict Kingsbury and Benjamin Straumann, 'The State of Nature and Commercial Sociability in Early Modern International Legal Thought', *Grotiana*, 31 (2010), 22-43.



## 2. Ferguson on unsocial sociability

One of the most distinctive contributions to the eighteenth-century Scottish debate about patriotism was set out by Adam Ferguson, Professor of Moral Philosophy and Pneumatics at the University of Edinburgh between 1764 and 1785. Patriotism loomed large in Ferguson's teaching at Edinburgh, where he described it as one of the crucial constituents of the 'happiness of a people'. In his lecture course, first summarised for publication in his 1769 *Institutes of Moral Philosophy*, he had adopted the language of republican patriotism, describing equal citizenship and the subordination of private to public interests as crucial foundations of love of country.<sup>15</sup> Yet the most distinctive aspects of Ferguson's thinking about patriotism derived from his emphatic insistence on the permanence and intensity of antagonism and enmity between independent nations. This view was a consequence of the underlying theory of human sociability he had set out in his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), and in his other published and unpublished works.

As I have argued elsewhere, the central feature of Ferguson's own theory of sociability was its strong emphasis on war and animosity as principles of social integration.<sup>16</sup> According to Ferguson, human nature itself was marked equally by propensities to love and fear, friendship and animosity, and what he called 'union' and 'dissension'. He insisted on this point with remarkable consistency throughout all his works, although it found clearest expression in the opening sections of the *Essay on the History of Civil Society*. In the course of dismantling the depictions of mankind's natural state set out by Hobbes and Rousseau, Ferguson elaborated

---

<sup>15</sup> For these two criteria of 'love of country' see Adam Ferguson, *Institutes of Moral Philosophy*, revised ed. (Edinburgh, 1773), 267-8.

<sup>16</sup> For an alternative exposition of this argument, see Iain McDaniel, *Adam Ferguson in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Roman Past and Europe's Future* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 74-83.

an alternative vision of human natural sociability. It was a mistake to assume, he wrote, that sociability was a consequence of either fear or love, or of amity or war. Instead, human beings had always been ‘mutual objects of both fear and love’ to each other. Furthermore, Ferguson dismissed the individualist starting point of the contractualist tradition in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political theory: mankind had always existed in groups.<sup>17</sup> These facts ensured that the dynamics of human association – in tribes, communities, or nations – were inseparable from the rivalries and antagonisms generated towards outsiders. As Ferguson put it: ‘Our attachment to one division, or to one sect, seems often to derive much of its force from an animosity conceived to an opposite one: and this animosity in its turn, as often arises from a zeal in behalf of the side we espouse, and from a desire to vindicate the rights of our party.’<sup>18</sup>

The central features of this way of thinking about the dynamics of human association survived unchanged throughout Ferguson’s works between the 1770s and 1790s. His core idea, that human nature was characterised simultaneously by the opposed tendencies of friendship and animosity, appeared frequently in both the published and unpublished versions of his Edinburgh University lectures on pneumatics and moral philosophy. What is perhaps most remarkable about these texts was his systematic insistence that man’s natural state had always been, and would remain, one of war and antagonism. In a lecture of November 1779, for example, he argued that the individual was ‘destined to have his Antagonist as well as Associate’, and to ‘have among his fellow Creatures Objects of Animosity and Distrust as well as Friendship’. He noted explicitly that ‘Man is by Nature in a State of War as well as

---

<sup>17</sup> Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge, 1995), 10. Ferguson underlined man’s ‘Instinctive Formation into Groups & Societies’ in many subsequent works: see e.g. Adam Ferguson, ‘Distinction of Value and Its Source in Existence’, in Ferguson, *The Manuscripts of Adam Ferguson*, edited by Vincenzo Merolle with Robin Dix and Eugene Heath (London, 2006), 86.

<sup>18</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 16, 21.

of Amity'.<sup>19</sup> In a subsequent lecture of 1779, he taught that 'in the History of human Nature...Man appears destined to War as well as Peace & Amity'.<sup>20</sup> Sociability, in this sense, was a principle of division as well as union:

The Tendency of human Nature is not to Universal Confederacy. But to separate Groupes & Partial Societys in which attachment to one Party is often the source of Animosity to another. And in this sense Society may be said to divide as well as to unite the Species.<sup>21</sup>

This quotation was an explicit statement of the 'unsociable' consequences of sociability itself. As Ferguson concluded in his discussion of this topic in the *Principles of Moral and Political Science*, the 'possibility of discord and war,' was 'entailed upon human nature'.<sup>22</sup>

It is important to situate this way of thinking about the dynamics of human association against earlier contributions to the eighteenth-century debate about sociability. On the one hand, Ferguson differed from those like Hobbes and Rousseau who had denied human natural sociability altogether. There was nothing artificial or derivative about the intense bonds that characterised the tribes or communities into which mankind were naturally divided. On the other hand, the emphasis on war and antagonism distinguished Ferguson's position from that of Hutcheson, who was unprepared to concede a natural principle of war or aggression. Ferguson's discussion can also be situated against wider eighteenth-century debates about the precise sequencing of the balance between sociability and war in the history of state

---

<sup>19</sup> Adam Ferguson, *Lectures on Pneumatics and Moral Philosophy*, MS, Papers of Professor Adam Ferguson, Edinburgh, University Library, DC.1.84 (26 Nov. 1779).

<sup>20</sup> Ferguson, *Lectures* (29 Nov. 1779).

<sup>21</sup> Ferguson, *Lectures* (3 Dec. 1783).

<sup>22</sup> For these quotations, see Ferguson, *Principles*, I, 16, 22-24; II, 206, 410.

formation. This question had been investigated by Montesquieu in Book 1 of *The Spirit of the Laws*, in which Montesquieu had argued that the ‘state of war’ began only after the establishment of societies (and not, as Hobbes had maintained, in the state of nature itself.) Montesquieu effectively historicised, but also reversed, Hobbes’s understanding of the relevance of war to the formation of societies.<sup>23</sup> Rousseau followed many aspects of Montesquieu’s critique of Hobbes, although Rousseau restricted the emergence of the ‘state of war’ to the establishment of what he called ‘the social state’. As Rousseau underlined in his manuscript ‘The State of War’, war was an outcome, rather than the cause, of the formation of separate, artificial political societies across the globe. It is noteworthy that one of the titles Rousseau originally considered for this manuscript was ‘That the State of War Arises from the Social State’.<sup>24</sup> Although the details of Ferguson’s position were different from those of both Montesquieu and Rousseau (I shall say more about this later), it makes sense to view his contribution as part of this larger body of work on the relationship between sociability and war. It was a feature of Ferguson’s work that made it part of the broader eighteenth-century debate on unsocial sociability.

### 3. Ferguson on the ‘rivalship and competition’ of nations

There was a direct connection between Ferguson’s theory of human sociability and his depiction of the character of the international order. He repeatedly insisted that the truncated character of sociability meant that a ‘plurality of nations’ would remain a permanent fixture of the international landscape. Furthermore, relations between independent nations would

---

<sup>23</sup> For the relevant passages, see Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, edited by Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge, 1989), 6-9.

<sup>24</sup> Rousseau, ‘The State of War’, in Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 167, 307.

inevitably be characterised by significant levels of enmity or animosity. In support of this position, Ferguson cited one of the earliest statements of a ‘realist’ position in international relations: the claim by Cleinias (the Cretan) in Plato’s *Laws* that ‘for everyone throughout the whole of life an endless war exists against all cities’.<sup>25</sup> He repeated this insight in the context of the French revolutionary wars in 1802, noting that it was ‘wise to consider the longest Peace but as a long Truce and a time of preparation for War’.<sup>26</sup> In the *Institutes of Moral Philosophy*, Ferguson identified differences of manners and customs as one of the causes that generated such ‘contempt and aversion’ among neighbouring nations.<sup>27</sup> But his main point was simply that national rivalries would remain a permanent fact of international life.

This picture of permanent and natural enmity among independent nations was a prominent feature of the history of mankind set out in the *Essay*. Referring to the almost constant divisions among ‘rude nations’ (savages and barbarians), Ferguson argued that ‘in barbarous times, mankind, being generally divided into small parties, are engaged in almost perpetual hostilities’. He noted ‘the repugnance to union, the frequent wars, or rather the perpetual hostilities, which take place among rude nations and separate clans’, which showed ‘how much our species is disposed to opposition, as well as to concert.’ Primitive tribes were, he

---

<sup>25</sup> According to Cleinias, the ancient legislator of Crete ‘condemned the mindlessness of the many, who do not realize that for everyone throughout the whole of life an endless war exists against all cities...For what most humans call peace he held only to be a name; in fact, for everyone there always exists by nature an undeclared war among all cities. If you look at it this way, you are pretty sure to find that the lawgiver of the Cretans established all our customs, public and private, with a view to war, and that he handed down the laws to be guarded according to these principles’. See Plato, *Laws*, trans. and ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago, 1980), 4 (625e-626b). For commentary, see Henrik Syse, ‘Plato: The Necessity of War, the Quest for Peace’, *Journal of Military Ethics*, 1 (2002), 36-44; Victor Alonso, ‘War, Peace, and International Law in Ancient Greece’, in Kurt A. Raaflaub, ed., *War and Peace in the Ancient World* (Oxford, 2007), 206-225.

<sup>26</sup> Ferguson to Henry Dundas, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1802, in Adam Ferguson, *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson*, edited by Vincenzo Merolle with an introduction by Jane B. Fagg, 2 vols. (London, 1995), II, 472.

<sup>27</sup> Adam Ferguson, *Institutes of Moral Philosophy*, rev’d ed. (Edinburgh, 1773), 26.

claimed, quite capable of establishing temporary confederacies for security or for conquest. But once immediate emergencies had passed, ‘they easily separate again, and act on the maxims of rival states.’ Nevertheless, violent national prejudices and animosities were by no means the monopoly of rude nations alone. Ferguson invited his readers to consider the ‘prejudices and national passions’ among the populations on either side of the Pyrenees, the Rhine, or the Channel, claiming that ‘it is among them that we find the materials of war and dissension laid without the direction of government, and sparks ready to kindle into a flame, which the statesmen is frequently disposed to extinguish.’<sup>28</sup> This, interestingly, was an early statement of the ways in which popular national sentiments and ‘prejudices’ might trump the rational or prudent pursuit of politics in the national interest. As Ferguson pointed out, the strength of patriotic passions could easily overwhelm calculations of ‘reasons of state’.

Ferguson drew two central conclusions about the role of war and international animosity for domestic politics. First, like many other thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, he suggested that war between separate societies formed the historical context for the emergence of civil government. Hume had made similar points as part of his own critique of Lockean social contract theory, suggesting that the first rudiments of civil authority developed because societies learned from the benefits of undivided command during warfare.<sup>29</sup> Ferguson made this kind of insight a cornerstone of his theoretical history of the state or civil society. As he wrote, ‘without the rivalship of nations, and the practice of war, civil society itself could hardly have found an object, or a form...The necessity of a public defence, has given rise to many departments of state, and the intellectual talents of men have found their busiest scene

---

<sup>28</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 27, 117, 123, 142.

<sup>29</sup> For Hume’s argument that the first rudiments of government emerged ‘from quarrels, not among men of the same society, but among those of different societies’ see David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev’d. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1978), 539-49 (III.2.viii). For Hume’s broader criticisms of Lockean contract theory, see David Hume, ‘Of the Original Contract’, in Hume, *Political Essays*, 186-201.

in wielding their national forces'.<sup>30</sup> In making this claim, he also reversed Rousseau's argument that war was a consequence, rather than a cause, of the formation of the political state and the rise of an individualised property-based regime.<sup>31</sup> The state was a product of war between pre-existing social groupings, not vice-versa.

The second point was that rivalry and antagonism served a crucial purpose in stimulating the civil and military virtues and in forging a vital 'national spirit'. Ferguson consistently stressed that conflict, struggle and rivalry played a crucial role in the moral formation of the individual. By extension, the antagonisms and rivalries unleashed during warfare were compatible with the exercise of mankind's highest talents and virtues: 'the best qualities of men, their candour, as well as their resolution, may operate in the midst of their quarrels.'<sup>32</sup> This meant that war itself could not be depicted as an unalloyed catastrophe. War was simply one of the many routes by which humans could depart from the stage of life.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, patriotic wars were compatible with both collective virtue and public happiness. As Ferguson wrote in the *Principles*, it would be 'folly, in reasoning of mankind, to consider the time of necessary war as a period of misery, or the period of peace as of course a season of happiness. In either conjuncture, the vices and follies of men may predominate; but, in either conjuncture, also, men have occasion to exercise their best affections and faculties; and, by this alone, the prevalence of good or ill, of public happiness or misery, can safely be determined'.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 46.

<sup>32</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 29.

<sup>34</sup> Ferguson, *Principles*, II, 501-02.

The broader point was that emulation and rivalry were essential guardians of the patriotic cohesion that Ferguson took to be crucial to the health and dynamism of civil society. As he wrote in the *Essay*, it was ‘vain to expect that we can give to the multitude of the people a sense of union among themselves, without admitting hostility to those who oppose them. Could we at once, in the case of any nation, extinguish the emulation which is excited from abroad, we should probably break or weaken the bands of society at home, and close the busiest scene of national occupations and virtues.’<sup>35</sup> There was a significant sense here in which Ferguson’s idea of ‘unsocial sociability’, in a somewhat different way to that of Kant, worked to promote the patriotic cohesion and moral flourishing of independent nations: ‘What threatened to ruin and overset every good disposition in the human breast, what seemed to banish justice from the societies of men, tends to unite the species in clans and fraternities; formidable, indeed, and hostile to one another, but in the domestic society of each, faithful, disinterested, and generous.’<sup>36</sup> A similar set of claims appeared in the *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (1792). Here Ferguson noted that ‘the members of each separate nation feel their connection the more, that the name of a fellow-countryman stands in contradistinction to an alien.’ Again, he noted the ‘force with which nature has directed rival nations to pull against one another,’ but also stressed how much these apparently divisive forces tended ‘to unite them in leagues more extensive than they would otherwise form.’<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 99. Despite some structural similarities between their views of ‘unsocial sociability’, it is important to note that Kant resisted the idea that mankind’s unsociable propensities could be a source of genuine moral virtues. I am grateful to Alexander Schmidt and Eva Pirimäe for highlighting this point. For Kant’s discussion of the ‘essentially healthy hostility’ between neighbouring states, see Kant, ‘Idea for a Universal History’, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Ferguson, *Principles*, I, 33.



These insights were at the core of Ferguson's theory of 'agonistic' patriotism, in which rivalry and even enmity between separate nations were seen as preferable to the disinterested 'impartiality' or extensive 'love of mankind' suggested by advocates of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism. Here Ferguson is best seen as reworking an old theme, expressed by writers from Juvenal to Machiavelli and Montaigne, which saw rivalry, enmity and *discordia* among separate communities as the main guarantee of virtue and political cohesion.<sup>38</sup> For example, in his *History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic*, first published in 1783, Ferguson praised Scipio's famous argument against the destruction of Carthage on the grounds that a powerful rival in Rome's vicinity would 'maintain the vigilance of state and the emulation of national virtue.'<sup>39</sup> This order of priorities also resulted in a striking argument about the dangers of adopting a posture of neutrality or impartiality in international relations. As Ferguson wrote in his 1776 pamphlet responding to Richard Price at the outset of the American war of independence, impartiality was a doubtful virtue 'when the cause of our country is at stake'.<sup>40</sup> Repeating the point in the 1792 *Principles*, he insisted that 'Indifference, more than candour, is likely to produce the appearance of impartiality, when the cause of our friend, or our country, is at stake.'<sup>41</sup> These claims remind us that Ferguson's writings on patriotism were shaped by his opposition to the

---

<sup>38</sup> Juvenal had written about the 'calamities of a long peace' (*nunc patimur longae pacis mala*), which included luxury, during the period of the Roman Empire; see *Juvenal and Persius*, ed. and trans. Susanna Morton Braund (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 258-59 (VI.292-293). Similarly, Machiavelli emphasised the positive consequences of foreign rivalry, claiming that 'the cause of disunity in republics is in most cases idleness and peace; the cause of unity is fear and warfare'; see Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, ed. and trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford, 2003), 227 (II.25). See also Montaigne's citation of the passage from Juvenal in Michel de Montaigne, 'Of ill means employed to a good end', in Montaigne, *The essays of Michael Seigneur de Montaigne, translated into English*, 3 vols. (London, 1759), II, 478. On the role of this way of conceiving enmity in the history of political thought see Ioannis D. Evrigenis, *Fear of Enemies and Collective Action* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> Adam Ferguson, *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh, 1799), I, 234.

<sup>40</sup> Ferguson, *Remarks on a Pamphlet lately published by Dr. Price* (London, 1776), 58.

<sup>41</sup> Ferguson, *Principles*, I, 33.

political arguments of contemporaries like Price, who had advocated a more ‘cosmopolitan’ response to the conflict with the American colonists.

#### 4. Ferguson on the balance of Europe

Ferguson’s account of ‘agonistic patriotism’ underpinned a distinctive vision of the eighteenth-century European state system. Although he produced no single text outlining this vision in detail, it is possible to discern in his writings a reasonably coherent argument about the appropriate institutional and political structures for Europe’s states and, more specifically, about the urgent need to maintain patriotism and military commitment among modern European ‘nations’. Crucially, Ferguson argued that Europe’s transformation into a realm of pacified commercial states was undermining patriotism and promoting stagnation, corruption and decline. Claiming that the economic and political trajectories of modern states would end in the establishment of wealthy but despotic regimes on the model of eighteenth-century China, he questioned the widespread eighteenth-century view that Europe’s commercial and cultural development would ultimately favour stability and even the cosmopolitan value of peace.<sup>42</sup> He also argued that a balance of commercial monarchies, competing purely economically, left Europe vulnerable to imperialism or conquest. Against this background, Ferguson argued that a balance of patriotic nations, with militarily-prepared citizenries, would secure Europe’s stability and liberty far better than the unstable commercial states and military monarchies that currently made up the system. According to this vision, the virtuous rivalry and healthy antagonism of independent and roughly equal-sized nations would

---

<sup>42</sup> The most famous version of this argument was contained in *The Spirit of the Laws*, in which Montesquieu had claimed that the ‘natural effect of commerce is to bring peace’. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 338.

constitute a firm guarantee against empire and also act as a brake upon the morally and politically tranquilising effects of *doux commerce*.

The immediate implication of Ferguson's idea of patriotism was the need to maintain a plurality of states in Europe. As he noted in the section of the *Essay* entitled 'Of the Influences of Climate and Situation', the division of Europe into distinct and independent communities had been one of the principal motors of civilization and a key to the progress of the arts and sciences. This was, in effect, a claim about the central role of national rivalry in driving forward the historical progress of Europe. According to Ferguson,

Among the advantages which enable nations to run the career of policy, as well as of arts, it may be expected, from the observations already made, that we should reckon every circumstance which enables them to divide and to maintain themselves in distinct and independent communities. The society and concourse of other men, are not more necessary to form the individual, than the rivalry and competition of nations are to invigorate the principles of political life in the state...The distinction of states being clearly maintained, a principle of political life is established in every division, and the capital of every district, like the heart in an animal body, communicates with ease the vital blood and the national spirit to its members.<sup>43</sup>

The single most important concept structuring Ferguson's suggestion for the best model of European politics was that of emulation. This focus on emulation aligned him with other key thinkers in Scotland, including Hume and Smith and, as we shall see, Kames. As Istvan Hont has argued, both Hume and Smith advocated 'emulation' instead of 'envy' as the guiding

---

<sup>43</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 61, 116-117.

moral principle for European economic development. In practical terms, this entailed replacing economic policies rooted in ‘jealousy’ (such as counter-productive commercial tariffs) with a more healthy focus on domestic economic development and peaceful trade.<sup>44</sup> Ferguson shared this emphasis on the positive psychological (and economic) benefits of emulation, although he was more prepared than Hume or Smith to countenance the domestic political benefits of ‘jealousy’ and even ‘enmity’.

Ferguson’s account of mankind’s unsocial sociability ultimately found expression in an argument for the maintenance of a balance of power among militarily and politically equal states, which would preserve emulation, the ‘national spirit’ and the ‘liberties of mankind’. This insistence on the balance of power as the best model for preserving European vitality distinguished Ferguson’s writing from some of the more farsighted eighteenth-century projects for the reorganisation of Europe, of which the most famous Scottish example was Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun’s proposal for a Europe of small-scale republican federations. There remained a good deal of interest in Fletcher’s cosmopolitan proposal for a federation of small and non-aggressive states in the period in which Ferguson was writing, and into the 1790s.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Ferguson’s view of human nature, and the permanence of national antagonisms, committed him to a different vision of Europe’s future. He suggested that emulation, respect and even fear between equal patriotic nations was a much better guarantee of the overall liberties of Europe than cosmopolitan proposals for perpetual peace. According to Ferguson, ‘where a number of states are contiguous, they should be near an equality, in

---

<sup>44</sup> Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, 115-25.

<sup>45</sup> On Fletcher, see the works cited in n. 1. For positive Scottish revaluation of Fletcher’s thought in the 1790s, see e.g. James, Earl of Buchan, *Essays on the Lives and Writings of Fletcher of Saltoun and the Poet Thomson: Biographical, Critical, and Political* (London, 1790); Andrew Fletcher, *The political works of Fletcher of Saltoun, with notes, &c. To which is prefixed a sketch of his life, with observations, moral, philosophical and political*, ed. R. Watson (London, 1798).

order that they may be mutually objects of respect and consideration, and in order that they may possess that independence in which the political life of a nation consists.’ Furthermore, ‘in every state, the freedom of its members depends on the balance and adjustment of its interior parts; and the existence of such freedom among mankind, depends upon the balance of nations.’ Finally, the ‘continuance of emulation among states, must depend on the degree of equality by which their forces are balanced; or on the incentives by which either party, or all, are urged to continue their struggles.’<sup>46</sup> Later, in his *Principles of Moral and Political Science*, Ferguson explicitly connected this ideal of military preparedness and armed emulation to the maintenance of peace and stability at the international level:

War is justly avoided, and peace among mankind is admitted to be a supreme object of consideration and desire: But we must not therefore enjoin it as an article of wisdom for nations to discontinue their military policy, and to neglect preparations for their own defence. These are often the surest preservatives of peace, and, joined to a scrupulous attention to abstain from wrongs or unnecessary provocations, are all that the most pacific nation can do to avoid the mischiefs of war.<sup>47</sup>

The continued significance of Ferguson’s thinking about patriotism and international competition is perhaps best illustrated by his response to the French Revolution in the 1790s and early 1800s. In his unpublished essays ‘Of Statesmen and Warriours’ and ‘On the French Revolution and its Still Impending Consequences’ (written between 1803 and 1808) he underlined the ease with which the French revolutionary republic had ‘trampled on all the former military establishments’ of Europe and had risen to the ‘unprecedented dominion of

---

<sup>46</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 61, 257, 202.

<sup>47</sup> Ferguson, *Principles*, II, 501-02.

nations formerly supposed invincible'.<sup>48</sup> France's expansion revealed the weaknesses of the existing balance of power among Europe's machine-like commercial states, which proved no match for the intense patriotic energies unleashed by the revolution. Ferguson explained that France's success *vis-à-vis* the other European powers was less a product of 'discipline' or strategy than the intense patriotic commitment of the population: the 'Effects of a National Spirit roused to uncommon exertion by revolutionary prospects of Elevation & Glory'.<sup>49</sup> He made a similar point in an 1802 letter to Henry Dundas, claiming that it was 'not the use of Arms but the National Spirit that has of late decided the Fortune of Europe'.<sup>50</sup> Ferguson's ideas about the invigorating effects of international enmity also led him to suggest that European statesmen should have avoided at all costs the military provocation of France. Left to its own devices, the young French republic would have collapsed in factional infighting at home. But the threat of war from abroad 'was in reality an admonition to Suspend this [sic] dissensions and Waste their dangerous powers on the Frontier'.<sup>51</sup> Ferguson's analysis of the politics of republican expansion in the 1790s and early 1800s was thus entirely congruent with his the logic of his earlier thinking about patriotism and international politics.

## 5. Lord Kames on sociability and aversion

A number of significant parallels with Ferguson's analysis of sociability and patriotism can be found in the writings of Henry Home, Lord Kames. Kames was a thinker of wide-ranging interests: his works encompassed the history of law and jurisprudence (especially in

---

<sup>48</sup> Ferguson, 'Of Statesmen and Warriours', in Adam Ferguson, *The Manuscripts of Adam Ferguson*, ed. Vincenzo Merolle with Robin Dix and Eugene Heath (London, 2006), 39.

<sup>49</sup> Ferguson, 'Of the French Revolution', in Ferguson, *Manuscripts*, 137.

<sup>50</sup> Ferguson to Henry Dundas, 28 Jan 1802, in Ferguson, *Correspondence*, ed. Merolle, II, 477.

<sup>51</sup> Ferguson, 'Of the French Revolution', 137.

Scotland), aesthetics, moral theory, and the ‘history of mankind’.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, the character of sociability, and its role in the formation of national societies, was a prominent theme in several of his writings from the early 1750s onwards. Kames’s most systematic contribution to the debate about sociability and the foundations of morality was his *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, first published in 1751, and revised in 1758 and 1779.<sup>53</sup> In the important second essay of this work, Kames engaged critically with the moral theories of both Hutcheson and Hume, and in later editions criticised Rousseau’s radical denial of natural sociability and his emphasis on self-love as a principle of morality.<sup>54</sup> As we shall see, the complex depiction of sociability set out in this work had some relevance for his account of patriotism. A more substantial contribution to the specific topic of patriotism appeared in Kames’s much larger *Sketches of the History of Man*, a work that first appeared in 1774 and had a wide European reception. Often seen as a key contribution to Scottish discussions about race, diversity and the history of human societies, the *Sketches* was also a serious analytical account of the moral foundations of patriotism.<sup>55</sup> One of the reasons

---

<sup>52</sup> On Kames’s various interests and their connection to Scottish Enlightenment preoccupations with the history of mankind, see especially Ian Simpson Ross, *Lord Kames and the Scotland of his Day* (Oxford, 1972); George W. Stocking, ‘Scotland as the Model of Mankind: Lord Kames’s Philosophical View of Civilization’, in T. H. H. Thorensen, ed., *Towards a Science of Man: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (The Hague, 1975), 65-89; David Lieberman, ‘The legal needs of a commercial society: the jurisprudence of Lord Kames’, in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983), 203-34; Kimihiro Koyanagi, ‘Civilization and history in Lord Kames and William Robertson’, in T. Sakamoto & H. Tanaka, ed., *The Rise of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (London, 2003), 150-162.

<sup>53</sup> The essays followed the natural law tradition in seeking to ground moral duties on a correct understanding of human nature since, Kames noted, ‘the nature of man is the foundation of the laws that ought to govern his actions’. Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, ed. Mary Catherine Moran (Indianapolis, 2005), 26.

<sup>54</sup> Kames, *Essays*, 76, n.

<sup>55</sup> On Kames’s contribution to debates about race and diversity, see Robert Wokler, ‘Apes and Races in the Scottish Enlightenment: Monboddo and Kames on the Nature of Man’, in Peter Jones, ed., *Philosophy and Science in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1988),

for the centrality of patriotism in the work stems from Kames's immediate worries about its absence in Britain, which he saw as part of the wider crisis undermining the British state in the 1770s. His theoretical reflections on the foundations and scope of national loyalties were thus connected to concerns about the threats to the stability of the British constitution, which he saw as imperilled by a combination of 'luxury', corruption, and the misguided republican politics driving the American colonists towards independence.<sup>56</sup> As Kames wrote in the Preface to the second part of the work, patriotism was the 'corner-stone of civil society', and 'no nation ever became great and powerful without it'.<sup>57</sup>

Kames tackled the connection between sociability and patriotism in the sketch entitled 'Appetite for Society – Origin of National Societies.' He took the basic fact of human sociability for granted, loosely echoing Aristotle's *Politics* in claiming that man was 'chief of the terrestrial creation' when linked with others in society, yet the 'most helpless and folorn' when in a solitary state.<sup>58</sup> A more difficult question was whether sociability embraced 'the whole species' or was 'in any manner limited'.<sup>59</sup> Kames straightforwardly denied that human beings, or any other animals for that matter, had an appetite for associating with the entire species. Rather, mankind had always been divided into small-scale tribes and societies. This could even be seen in large territorial states like the Roman Empire, in which smaller-scale

---

145-68; Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (New York and Basingstoke, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> The issue of luxury was one of the grounds for Kames's admiration for Ferguson's *Essay*: see Kames to Elizabeth Montagu, 6 March 1767, in Alexander Fraser Tytler, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Honourable Henry Home of Kames*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1807), II, 48-49.

<sup>57</sup> Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, ed. with an intro. by James A. Harris (Indianapolis, 2005), II, 337.

<sup>58</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 348. For a similar passage in Aristotle – though Aristotle was if anything even more scathing of man's character in the solitary state – see Aristotle, *The Politics and Constitution of Athens*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge, 1996), 13-14 (1253a).

<sup>59</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 339.



‘orders, associations, fraternities and divisions’ tended to emerge naturally.<sup>60</sup> This claim about the limited character of human sociability supported Kames’s predilection for small states, something he shared with Fletcher, Hutcheson and other Scottish writers.<sup>61</sup>

Kames also noted the strength of the ‘aversions’ that characterised relations between independent societies. He emphasised this point very strongly in the ‘Preliminary Discourse’ to the *Sketches* as a whole, noting that there was ‘no propensity in human nature more general than aversion to strangers.’<sup>62</sup> His ‘natural history of man’ was designed, in part, to support this central claim about the force of inter-societal aversion. The natives of Greenland ‘consider the rest of mankind as a different race, with whom they reject all society’. Among the Romans, the same word (*hostis*) was used for both stranger and enemy.<sup>63</sup> Clusters of small republics, such as those of Renaissance Tuscany, were characterised by ‘mutual hatred, usual between nations in close neighbourhood’.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the strength of aversion was directly proportionate to the strength of patriotic loyalty. As Kames declared, ‘nations the most remarkable for patriotism, are equally remarkable for aversion to strangers’, a comment which applied to the Greeks, the Romans, the Jews, and the English. These points meant that Kames’s *Sketches* shared a similar intellectual framework with Ferguson’s *Essay*.

---

<sup>60</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 349.

<sup>61</sup> On small states in eighteenth-century thought, see Richard Whatmore, “‘Neither masters nor slaves’: Small States and Empire in the Long Eighteenth Century”, in Duncan Kelly, ed. *Lineages of Empire. The Historical Roots of British Imperial Thought* (London, 2009), 53-81, and Whatmore, ‘Vattel, Britain and Peace in Europe’, *Grotiana*, 31 (2010), 85-107. For further examples of Scottish praise for small states, see Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy* [1755], intro. Daniel Carey, 2 vols. (London, 2005), II, 240-50, and Robert Wallace, *Various Prospects of Mankind, Nature, and Providence*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London, 1761), 33-125.

<sup>62</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, I, 26.

<sup>63</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 183.

<sup>64</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, I, 104.

Kames's insistence on the strength of the principle of aversion in human nature had a number of broader implications. First and foremost, it was part of a wider emphasis on the 'unsocial' propensities of human nature. According to Kames, man was a 'compound of principles and passions, some social, some dissocial.'<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, this compound structure was a crucial part of nature's providential purpose for humanity (there are some resemblances here with Kant's view that unsocial sociability formed part of a 'hidden plan of nature').<sup>66</sup> The fact that human sociability was limited to the formation of small-scale societies served beneficial purposes: 'Every work of Providence contributes to some good end: a small tribe is sufficient for mutual defence; and a very large tribe would find difficulty in procuring subsistence.'<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, a world of perfect concord and affection – a world purged of unsociable passions – would in effect deprive human beings of the stimulus necessary for the forging of the virtues: 'scarce any motive to action would remain; and man, reduced to a lethargic state, would rival no being above an oyster or a sensitive plant.' Seen from this angle, a condition of universal peace, concord, and security was by no means the best terrain for the flourishing of human virtues. At this point Kames made an interestingly ambiguous comment on Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*. He noted that Mandeville had indeed shown that private vices could be considered as public benefits. But, Kames thought, Mandeville's triumph would have been greater had he shown 'that selfish and dissocial vices promote the most elevated virtues; and that, if such vices were eradicated, man would be a grovelling and contemptible being'. There is a sense here in which Kames was elaborating a theodicy, in which the existence of 'evils' in human life were viewed providentially as essential to the 'improvement of our faculties and passions'.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 361.

<sup>66</sup> Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History', 50.

<sup>67</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 344.

<sup>68</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 364-368.

A second implication of Kames's argument was that the philosophical proponents of mankind's extensive sociability had erred in identifying a 'moral duty' of universal benevolence. Here he was criticising the third Earl of Shaftesbury as well as Hutcheson, both of whom he interpreted as defending an unrealistic conception of the scope of human benevolence. This point was a development of the critique of universal benevolence that he had already presented in the *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*. In the *Essays*, Kames had insisted that a sense of universal benevolence was not natural to man in any obvious sense. He criticised Shaftesbury for suggesting that unless benevolence be 'entire and directed to the whole species, it is not benevolence at all.'<sup>69</sup> Although in the *Essays* Kames did accept the existence of a kind of universal benevolence, grounded on the mind's capacity for extending partial affections to abstract terms (like 'country' or 'mankind'), the argument in the *Sketches* remained dismissive of the idea: 'From the foregoing deduction, universal benevolence, inculcated by several writers as a moral duty, is discovered to have no foundation in the nature of man. Our appetite for society is limited, and our duty must be limited in proportion.'<sup>70</sup> This conception of sociability also contradicted Hutcheson's gravitational metaphor of universal benevolence as it extended across mankind. As I noted above, Hutcheson saw sociability in quasi-Stoic terms as encompassing the entire human community, and only gently weakening as it spread outwards

---

<sup>69</sup> Kames, *Essays*, 55.

<sup>70</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 355. In the *Essays*, Kames insisted that humans had no natural benevolence towards all of mankind. But he did identify a 'happy contrivance of nature' by which abstract terms like 'our religion, our country, our government, or even mankind' could become objects of genuine and intense affection. Kames argued that the ordinary human capacity for abstract thought enabled people to transfer the intense affections that they usually would only feel for particular individuals to abstract concepts: 'Nothing more ennobles human nature than this principle of action: nor is there anything more wonderful, than that a general term which has no precise meaning, should be the foundation of a more intense affection than is bestowed, for the most part, upon particular objects, even the most attractive...By this curious mechanism, the defect of our nature is amply remedied. Distant objects, otherways invisible, are rendered conspicuous: accumulation makes them great; and greatness brings them near the eye: affection is preserved, to be bestowed entire, as upon a single object.' See Kames, *Essays*, 43-44.

through the various ‘Systems’ that made up the largest ‘System’ of mankind. For Kames, by contrast, animosity was at its strongest among immediate neighbours: the ‘nearer they are to one another, the greater is their mutual rancour and animosity’.<sup>71</sup>

## 6. Kames on patriotism, war and peace

Kames’s emphasis on the limited extent of sociable affections, and his corresponding insistence on the strength of ‘aversions’ in human nature, ultimately underpinned a comprehensive rejection of the cosmopolitan ideals of peace and international concord. The most dramatic expression of his argument in this respect was the sketch entitled ‘War and Peace compared’, which contained a full-scale attack on the prominent eighteenth-century idea of Europe as constituted by peaceful commercial states. Kames worked out further details of his thinking about patriotism and the international order in the sketches entitled ‘Great and Small States Compared’ and ‘The Rise and Fall of Patriotism.’ The fundamental arguments that he developed in these pieces centred on the primacy of patriotism, which he saw as the key to maintaining the stability, liberty and duration of states. It was this commitment to patriotism that ultimately led Kames to defend the vital importance of national enmities, and even war, as the key to maintaining the moral and political health of modern Europe.

Kames’s most explicit reflections on the love of country were set out in the sketch entitled ‘Rise and Fall of Patriotism’, in which he analysed the foundations of what he called *amor patriae*. This was essentially a theory of republican patriotism, in which a commitment to a

---

<sup>71</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 361.

free constitution was seen as the fundamental mechanism for maintaining patriotic feelings. Patriotism depended on the emergence of a common language and the possession of a shared territory (*patria*), but it was far more than a shared affection for a familiar locality. Rather, following Cicero's *De Officiis*, Kames explained that patriotism was a true love of one's country and one's fellow citizens, and represented the highest expression of the social affections. It was the distinctive characteristic of a 'people intimately connected by regular government, by husbandry, by commerce, and by a common interest.' Its effect was to command esteem, to inspire virtue, and to strengthen morals among a people.<sup>72</sup> Kames went on to specify a number of criteria that favoured the maintenance of patriotism among states, and even went so far as to claim that forms of government ought to be judged on their capacity to inspire patriotic sentiment.<sup>73</sup> Many of his ideas looked back to standard themes within the civic humanist tradition of political thought. Equal citizenship was significant: the Roman republic only developed true patriotism after the legal distinction between plebeian and patrician had been abolished.<sup>74</sup> Rotation of offices, which ensured that office-holders competed for the approbation of their fellow citizens, was salutary.<sup>75</sup> Just as importantly, patriotism was more easily preserved in small states than in extensive monarchies or empires: 'patriotism is vigorous in small states; and hatred to neighbouring states, no less so: both vanish in a great monarchy.'<sup>76</sup> Once again, here Kames echoed Ferguson in thinking that the strength of national loyalties was directly tied to the strength of 'hatreds' towards foreigners or enemies.

---

<sup>72</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 416-417.

<sup>73</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 383.

<sup>74</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 421.

<sup>75</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 383.

<sup>76</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 396.

Kames's explanation for the 'rise and fall' of patriotism was patterned upon a broader story about the rise and fall of the sociable affections as societies progressed from the savage to the civilized state. He first described this in a sketch entitled 'Manners', which contained an embryonic conjectural history of the rise and decline of patriotism. According to Kames, patriotism and the sociable affections were at their strongest during the intermediate stages of social progress, whereas both very primitive and very civilized states were marked by high levels of selfishness:

In the original state of hunters, there being little connection among individuals, every man minds his own concerns, and selfishness governs. The discovery that hunting is best carried on in company, promotes some degree of society in that state: it gains ground in the shepherd state, and makes a capital figure where husbandry and commerce flourish. Private concord is promoted by social affection; and a nation is prosperous in proportion as the *amor patriae* prevails. But wealth, acquired whether by conquest or commerce, is productive of luxury, and every species of sensuality. As these increase, social affections decline, and at last vanish...And thus, in the progress of manners, men end as they began: selfishness is no less eminent in the last and most polished state of society, than in the first and most rude state.<sup>77</sup>

Kames added to this in the sketch on the rise and fall of patriotism by claiming that patriotism was best underpinned by struggle, emulation and rivalry. Nothing was more favourable to patriotism than the successful struggles for liberty made by citizens against domestic tyrants or foreign oppressors. A 'nation in that state resembles a comet, which, in passing near the

---

<sup>77</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, I, 178-9, 202-04.

sun, has been much heated, and continues full of motion.’<sup>78</sup> The struggles of small states for liberty or independence were followed by rapid advances in the fine arts, sciences, and public institutions. Purely domestic competition among equals for honours, glory and prestige was also a significant source of patriotic virtue:

One who makes a figure rouses emulation in all: one catches fire from another, and the national spirit flourishes: classical works are composed, and useful discoveries made in every art and science.’<sup>79</sup>

On the other hand, patriotism inevitably declined among ‘stationary’ societies. Here Kames cited a traditional list of stagnating trading republics (Venice, Portugal, the Dutch Republic), who had been overtaken in trade and power by more patriotically-motivated successors. A similar fate awaited Britain, with its increasingly corrupt East India Company.<sup>80</sup> Patriotism, finally, was undermined by the selfishness generated by inequality and luxury. The selfishness produced by luxury, by ‘ingrossing the whole soul, eradicates patriotism, and leaves not a cranny for social virtue.’<sup>81</sup>

It is perhaps worth underlining that Kames’s call for a revival of patriotism in Britain was by no means intended to promote any kind of independent Scottish nationhood. Like other variants of ‘north British’ patriotism, Kames’s conception of patriotism was not incompatible with an admiration of English institutions and their effectiveness in promoting the

---

<sup>78</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 419.

<sup>79</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, I, 102.

<sup>80</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 426.

<sup>81</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 205.

modernization of Scotland.<sup>82</sup> The thrust of his argument in the *Sketches* underlined the urgent need of retaining the British union, especially given the dangerous centrifugal pressures placed upon the state by the factious American colonists. In the course of his discussion, Kames developed an argument about why a distinctively Scottish ‘national spirit’ would flourish best in the framework of a larger British union. He condemned the Union of Crowns of 1603 as destroying Scottish patriotism: ‘the union of the two crowns had introduced despotism into Scotland, which sunk the genius of the people, and rendered them heartless and indolent.’<sup>83</sup> The 1707 Union, by contrast, initiated a sustained revival of liberty and patriotism. By converting the English and the Scots into a single people, the Union made it possible for the Scots to abandon their traditional enmities towards the English and to engage in more productive forms of national emulation:

Liberty, indeed, and many other advantages, were procured to them by the union of the two kingdoms; but these salutary effects were long suspended by mutual enmity, such as commonly subsists between neighbouring nations. Enmity wore away gradually, and the eyes of the Scots were opened to the advantages of their present condition: the national spirit was roused to emulate and excel: talents were exerted, hitherto latent; and Scotland, at present, makes a figure in arts and sciences, above what it ever made while an independent kingdom.<sup>84</sup>

The passage suggests that Kames believed that productive forms of national emulation could take place between two national groups in the context of a single political state.

---

<sup>82</sup> On north British patriotism, see especially Colin Kidd, ‘North Britishness and the nature of eighteenth-century British patriotisms’, *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), 361-382.

<sup>83</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 422; I, 104.

<sup>84</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, I, 102.



The most striking consequence of Kames's fixation on maintaining the patriotic vigour of states was the full-blown critique of 'perpetual peace' he outlined in the sketch 'War and Peace compared'. This sketch, which focused on the dangers posed by stagnation in pacific commercial states, was a direct consequence of Kames's underlying theory of sociability and his view that mankind's unsociable passions formed part of a harmonious providential order. He had already hinted towards this point in a comment at the end of the sketch on the 'Origin of Nations', in which he attacked a passage in the comte de Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*, in which Buffon had lamented the destructive consequences of discord and war and prayed for the establishment of a new, pacific golden age. From Kames's point of view, Buffon's vision of a golden age of peace and concord failed to recognise that the 'jumble of good and ill, malice mixed with benevolence, friendship alloyed with fraud, peace with alarms of war' existing in the world was a crucial part of God's providential design for mankind.<sup>85</sup> Kames developed this perspective in the sketch on war and peace by highlighting the dangers of combining wealth, peace and security for prolonged periods. Man, he wrote, 'by constant prosperity and peace, degenerates into a mean, impotent, and selfish animal.'<sup>86</sup> The consequences of commercial peace for states were equally severe. Kames argued that Carthage, Venice, the Dutch Republic and Japan had all been destroyed by the 'poison of perpetual peace and security.' He even condemned the famous 'Grand Design' of the French king Henry IV (1553-1610) and his minister, the duc de Sully (1560-1641), as a project of unmitigated folly. His view seems to have been that the refashioning of Europe into a kind of pacific confederation would have destroyed the military preparedness, or vigilance, produced

---

<sup>85</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 369-70. Kames was attacking two long paragraphs in which Buffon had condemned the 'presumptuous tumults of war and discord'. Buffon's English translator surmised that the section was a veiled critique of Anglo-French rivalry during the era of the Seven Years War. See George Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, *Natural History, General and Particular, by the Count de Buffon, translated into English*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh, 1780), VI, 261-63.

<sup>86</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 408.

by the threat of war among European states. This, he implied, would have rendered Europe vulnerable to an invasion from more militaristic states and empires in the east: 'Conquest, in a retrograde motion, would have directed its progress from the east to the west.'<sup>87</sup> His conclusions to this section ran in parallel with his broader view of the providential logic of mankind's unsociable propensities:

But war is necessary for man, being a school for improving every manly virtue; and Providence renders kings blind to their true interest, in order that war may sometimes take place. To rely upon Providence in the government of this world, is the wisdom of man.

Upon the whole, perpetual war is bad, because it converts men into beasts of prey; perpetual peace is worse, because it converts men into beasts of burden. To prevent such woful degeneracy on both hands, war and peace alternately are the only effectual means; and these means are adopted by Providence.<sup>88</sup>

Kames's explicit justification of war as a providential school for virtue and civilization was perhaps the most extreme expression of the language of 'unsociable' patriotism in eighteenth-century Scotland. Nevertheless, he offered one mitigating observation. Kames suggested that wars in the eighteenth century were no longer the scenes of violence and cruelty they had been in the past. Like many other contemporary writers, he stressed that the progress of civilization had led to the establishment of laws of war and to a distinction between civilian and military personnel. This meant that wars between large modern states were no longer animated by the personal resentment that characterised ancient and barbarous wars, and could instead be seen as a positive force for the formation of virtue and courage:

---

<sup>87</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 411.

<sup>88</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, II, 414-15.

One would imagine war to be a soil too rough for the growth of civilization; and yet it is not always an unkindly soil. War between two small tribes is fierce and cruel: but a large state mitigates resentment, by directing it not against individuals, but against the state. We know no enemies but those who are in arms: we have no resentment against others, but rather find a pleasure in treating them with humanity. Cruelty, having thus in war few individuals for its object, naturally subsides; and magnanimity in its stead transforms soldiers from brutes to heroes.<sup>89</sup>

Kames concluded that ‘war carried on in that manner, would, from desolation and horror, be converted into a fair field for acquiring true military glory, and for exercising every manly virtue.’<sup>90</sup>

### Conclusion

The language of ‘unsociable’ patriotism that ran through the writings of Ferguson and Kames represents a significant contribution to Enlightenment debates about the causes of political association, the history of civilization and the prospect of reforming the eighteenth-century state system. Grounded on the insight that sociability was a principle of division as well as union – and that the human species was as much disposed to ‘opposition’ or ‘aversion’ as it was to ‘friendship’ or ‘concert’ – their accounts must be distinguished from two prominent alternative eighteenth-century perspectives on sociability. On the one hand, Ferguson’s and Kames’s insistence that humans were naturally sociable distinguished their thinking from that

---

<sup>89</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, I, 196-97.

<sup>90</sup> Kames, *Sketches*, I, 199, n.

of Hobbes and Rousseau, both of whom had sought to undercut the idea of a pre-political principle of human association. On the other hand, their central emphasis on antagonism, enmity and hostility distinguished their accounts from the mainstream of eighteenth-century theorists of ‘sociable patriotism’, who tended to underplay the divisiveness and dissension to which human nature was prone. Furthermore, neither Ferguson nor Kames can be assimilated to the most prominent eighteenth-century conceptions of cosmopolitanism. Their strong claims about the permanence of national rivalry or antagonism made them sceptical of any reconciliation between the ‘national interest’ and the ‘interest of mankind’ or, what amounted to the same thing, of separating patriotism from national animosity. Furthermore, both thinkers were deeply opposed to what recent scholarship has termed ‘commercial’ cosmopolitanism, the idea that peaceful commerce, grounded on the alleged integrative sociability of markets, could ultimately help to pacify international relations.<sup>91</sup> Seen from that perspective, Ferguson and Kames were important critics of both cosmopolitan republicanism as well as the Enlightenment ideal of *doux commerce*.

By way of conclusion, it is perhaps worth emphasising that this line of thinking was by no means a peculiarity of eighteenth-century Scottish thought. Rather, similar ideas about the importance of national rivalry in sustaining patriotism and vigilance were put forward by many European thinkers in the second half of the eighteenth century. Among these was the French writer, the abbé Mably, who referred explicitly to the positive effects of ‘jealousy and discord’ in forestalling the enervation of the ancient Greek republics.<sup>92</sup> The young Swiss

---

<sup>91</sup> In order to understand some of the ways in which this contrasted with Adam Smith, see Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy*, 196-217.

<sup>92</sup> According to Mably, ‘jealousy and discord’ between the Greek states served to maintain Greece’s ability against external enemies: ‘Without this fermentation, the Citizens, enervated by employment merely Civil, and a long cessation of military toils, would never have been able to have defended their country against a Foreign Enemy. It was to her distrusts, her jealousies, and her disputes, that Greece became indebted for soldiers and for Generals,

historian, Johannes von Müller, made a similar claim about the priority of patriotism over cosmopolitanism in his *Allgemeine Aussicht über die Bundesrepublik im Schweizerland*, an account of the moral and political foundations of Swiss republican politics written in manuscript in 1776-77. Müller, who was a close reader of Ferguson's *Essay*, argued that the partiality (*Parteilichkeit*) of states towards foreigners should not be condemned but rather recognised as a key source of domestic concord and patriotic identity. In line with this view, he identified the citizens of ancient Sparta as exemplifying the priority of patriotism over cosmopolitanism, claiming that if the 'Lacedaemonians had been what we call *world citizens*, rather than Spartan citizens, they would never have died for their fatherland.'<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, as Eva Piirimäe has recently shown, Ferguson's account of agonistic rivalry was an important influence on Johann Gottfried Herder's qualified rehabilitation of the integrative capacity of national prejudices.<sup>94</sup> Other scholars have detected echoes of Ferguson's position in Hegel's early writings on the German constitution (1798-1802) and on natural law (1802-1803), both of which offered a partial revaluation of war as a counterweight against the stagnation and atomism produced by perpetual peace.<sup>95</sup> When placed in this perspective, Ferguson's and Kames's own accounts of mankind's unsociable proclivities and their positive role in

---

whose courage, discipline, and professional skill, repaired, in some measure, the feebleness of her Political constitution'. See Gabriel Bonnot, abbé de Mably, *Observations on the manners, government, and policy of the Greeks* (Oxford, 1784), 35.

<sup>93</sup> See Johannes von Müller, *Allgemeine Aussicht über die Bundesrepublik im Schweizerland: Deutsche Fassung 1776-1777*, ed. Doris and Peter Walser Wilhelm (Zürich, 1991), 91. For an alternative Swiss contribution to European debates about patriotism, commerce and international relations see Béla Kapossy, 'Iselins *Geschichte der Menschheit* als Friedenschrift', in *Isaak Iselin und die Geschichtsphilosophie der Europäischen Aufklärung*, ed. Lucas Marco Gisi and Wolfgang Rother (Basel, 2011), 101-23.

<sup>94</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, 'This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity', Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge, 2002), 297; see Eva Piirimäe, 'Sociability, Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Herder's Early Philosophy of History', *History of Political Thought* (forthcoming).

<sup>95</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, 'The German Constitution' and 'On the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law', in Hegel, *Political Writings*, edited by Laurence Dickey and H. B. Nisbet, and translated by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, 1999), 7, 141, 274, n. See also Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, 1991), 361-62 (§324).

sustaining the political cohesion and martial character of nations can be recognised as distinctive Scottish variants on a wider eighteenth-century theme.